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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 LAGOS 000134

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STATE FOR AF/W
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TAGS: [NI](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PTER](#)

SUBJECT: NGOS TO RECLAIM THE NIGER DELTA STRUGGLE; PUSH FOR
DEMOCRACY

REF: LAGOS 48

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Classified By: Consul General Brian L. Browne for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D)

11. (C) Summary. On January 25 Niger Delta experts described to AF/W Deputy Director Don Heflin a pan-Delta manifesto to be presented to presidential candidates in an effort to begin serious national dialogue on the Niger Delta. Similarly, the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG) has brought sixty to seventy NGOs together under the Coalition for Issues Based Politics and Good Governance (CIPOGG) to engage candidates on key policy and reform issues as well as accountability in the upcoming elections. CIPOGG supporter and NGO activist Yemisi Ransome-Kuti told Heflin that former military ruler General Muhammadu Buhari's departure from a fundamentalist religious platform and commitment to democratic processes make him a more desirable candidate than the PDP's candidate, Katisna Governor Yar'Adua, whom she described as politically weak. End Summary.

INJUSTICE AND POOR DEVELOPMENT BREEDS NATIONALISM

12. (C) Long-standing injustice in the Niger Delta has bred a sense of ethnic nationalism and a desire of inhabitants to control oil fields and fight corruption, Itsekiri Chief Hope Harriman told visiting AF/W Deputy Director Donald Heflin on January 25. Petroleum profits go directly through Lagos where the oil companies are based, thereby cheating oil producing states and communities of hefty tax revenue, Harriman complained. Corruption and complicity in oil bunkering is evidenced by bunkerers' ability to discern which of 19 pipelines were carrying oil at any given moment, he asserted.

13. (C) Development commissions are moribund and have failed to improve the region, Harriman lamented. Even worse, they facilitate corruption. Harriman juxtaposed the 18 years it took to build the Warri-Benin road with the efficient

construction of a road leading to President Obasanjo's chicken farm in Ogun State. In place of development projects, one sees signboards on the side of the road and expensive automobiles being given to the directors of development organizations, accused Harriman. Harriman further chided the inefficiency and high costs associated with reliance on privately-owned generators for electricity throughout the Delta instead of access to a reliable public grid.

¶4. (C) In addition to the government's failure to develop the Niger Delta, Harriman described Chevron's longstanding failure to actualize two development schemes in Escravos, Delta State. Chevron reneged on a 1984 agreement to commission a community-designed master plan to build a new town on 324 acres of land, Harriman chided. Similarly, Chevron withdrew support for micro-enterprising fish and chicken farming projects. These projects would have provided the oil companies a locally-produced food supply; it is unclear why the projects were abandoned. Partly as a result of such aborted development measures by Chevron and the other oil majors, the issues of the Niger Delta have grown to be "bigger than the brains of those in charge," Harriman criticized.

SOLUTIONS: DELTA MANIFESTO AND INTERNATIONAL INTERVENTION

¶5. (C) Oronto Douglas, founder of the non-partisan Community Defense Law Foundation (CDLF) and Environmental Rights Action (ERA), is creating a Niger Delta Manifesto to help civil society groups reclaim leadership of "the Niger Delta struggle" from armed militant groups. The manifesto would be presented to 2007 presidential candidates in March and would seek dialogue and support for improving the oil-rich Delta. Douglas said the manifesto incorporates input from NGOs,

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scholars, political figures, numerous ethnic groups throughout Delta, and even the Economic and Financial Crimes Commission (EFCC). The Manifesto addresses the need for serious and committed dialogue on five critical issues: communal property rights, environmental protection and justice, political participation, nationalism, and free enterprise.

¶6. (C) Chief Hope Harriman said a solution needs to come from outside Nigeria or "nothing will be done." In regard to the need for outside help, Harriman drew no distinction between the Delta and Darfur. Harriman believes the Niger Delta requires international intervention and suggested either the United Nations or European Union create an agency to oversee development there. Similarly, Douglas agreed with Harriman that international intervention, not dialogue orchestrated from Abuja, was needed to facilitate a serious discussion on improving the Niger Delta.

NGO SEEKS POLITICAL DEBATES AND PARTICIPATION IN 2007

¶7. (C) On January 26, Mansur Ahmed, Director General of the Nigerian Economic Summit Group (NESG), told Heflin a coalition of 60-70 NGOS are advocating for public debates in the upcoming elections. Given that Nigeria has dozens of presidential and gubernatorial hopefuls, the coalition would identify six key candidates for the debate, Ahmed said. A number of NGOs active in the Niger Delta are members of the coalition. Based on her experience thus far as a social activist and member of the NESG coalition, Yemisi Ransome-Kuti told Heflin she expects prominent Nigerians to be involved.

¶8. (C) In addition to hosting a debate among key political candidates, Ahmed said NESG has been sending mass text messages imploring Nigerians to register to vote. Ahmed commented that registration levels are "terribly low" and

there are not enough voter registration machines, operators are poorly trained, and the machines have numerous breakdowns. Despite inadequate voter registration, Ahmed was confident the 2007 elections would be better than its immediate predecessor because Nigerians would not accept manipulations like in 2003, he assessed. Additionally, President Obasanjo had a vested interest in a relatively transparent election because Nigerians expect him to deliver a democratic process and Obasanjo wants to remain an international statesman. Ahmed was confident Nigeria is improving, albeit slowly.

¶9. (SBU) Ransome-Kuti was hopeful this coalition could begin to support civil society and to monitor national and state spending. Citing Rivers State in particular, Ransome-Kuti criticized unmonitored state spending as an impediment to growth. On accountability, Ahmed opined one day Nigeria would have a general accounting office to help track federal earnings, spending, and distribution. Heflin replied that in the U.S. the General Accounting Office helps Congress track executive spending.

YAR'ADUA NOT BACKED BY PDP

¶10. (C) Ransome-Kuti believed Peoples Democratic Party (PDP) presidential candidate Katsina State Governor Umaru Yar'Adua does not have the political strength nor PDP machinery behind him to run a strong campaign. Ahmed agreed with Ransome-Kuti that it is unlikely Yar'Adua has full PDP backing because Obasanjo announced Yar'Adua as his anointed candidate the morning of the PDP national convention, thereby causing a rift within the party (Reftel). While Yar'Adua has not been charged with corruption, he also does not have anything to show for his eight years as Katsina State Governor, Ahmed criticized.

BUHARI HAS MORAL HIGH GROUND

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¶11. (C) Turning to the opposition, our interlocutors glossed over Action Congress presidential candidate Atiku and focused on Buhari. Harriman said he would vote for All Nigeria People's Party (ANPP) candidate General Muhammadu Buhari because he would clean house and jail corrupt politicians. Harriman suspected a lot of people would flee Nigeria if Buhari won the 2007 election. Harriman believes the North is more likely than any other region in Nigeria to champion the Niger Delta cause. Buhari is "not that bad," Harriman commented, and said Ibrahim Babangida is responsible for Buhari's unpopularity.

¶12. (C) Buhari has gained a lot of ground because he has moved away from fundamentalist platforms and is disciplined enough to re-instate the "law of the land," Ransome-Kuti opined. Buhari's funding comes from ANPP governors, northern supporters, and from the Diaspora, Ransome-Kuti advised. While he lacks adequate funding compared to Yar'Adua, he might be able to mobilize more funds from estranged PDP members disgruntled at Obasanjo's last minute announcement of Yar'Adua as his anointed successor, Ransome-Kuti opined. NGOs and civil society should stop deriding Buhari's military background and instead focus on his ability to change Nigeria, Ransome-Kuti claimed. If Buhari lost, Ransome-Kuti predicted he would not resort to violence but take his grievance through judicial channels as he did in 2003, because Buhari was committed to democracy. However, she was concerned that committed young supporters from the north might take more extreme action.

¶13. (C) Ransome-Kuti admitted it is hard to tell whether Yar'Adua or Buhari would effectuate the most change in the Niger Delta because so many qualified people in the past have gone into government and not delivered. The question now is

which candidate can articulate a vision for Nigeria. The NESG coalition would push for an issues-based election, our interlocutors said.

COMMENT

¶14. (C) Our interlocutors gave a more positive outlook on the Niger Delta and upcoming elections than is often presented. The indigenous effort to reclaim the Niger Delta struggle and begin national dialogue on the subject is admirable. Similarly, the call for and discussion of issue-based campaigns is an advancement in Nigerian civil society. Whether political candidates and strongmen would choose to support these efforts remains to be seen.

¶15. (C) The assessment of Yar'Adua is typical. However, the positive comments regarding Buhari are unusual. Harriman commented that old age allows one to say what others cannot; this may explain his favorable comments towards Buhari. Many of our contacts in the Southwest, on the other hand, speak negatively of Buhari. The opinions expressed may be either an indication of changing sentiment or simply a minority view in the south. End Comment.

¶16. (U) AF/W Deputy Director Don Heflin cleared this cable.
BROWNE